

INTRODUCTION

In 1982, the Portage Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), in cooperation with the USDA, Soil Conservation Service (SCS) took part in the National Resources Inventory (NRI). Information was collected on over 200 sample units to provide county reliable resource data.

This inventory provided natural resource data on (1) land use, (2) conservation treatment needs, (3) prime farmland, (4) potential cropland, (5) sheet and rill erosion, (6) flood prone areas, (7) wetlands, and (8) small bodies of water.

The study identifies erosion and land management problems in Portage County. These problems were addressed and priorities set in the District's long-range program. Top priorities include:

- A. Improve Water Quality
 - 1. Sediment Control - rural and urban areas
 - 2. Animal Waste Management
- B. Reduce Soil Erosion
- C. Improve Fish and Wildlife Habitat
- D. Provide Consultive Service - in areas dealing with soil and water management problems
- E. Provide soil and water information to schools, service clubs, units of government

This publication distributes the results of the Portage County Resources Inventory. The publication describes the soil resource base and highlights some problems that could reduce future soil productivity. Along with reduced production, off site damages could be expected. A primary objective of the Portage SWCD is to promote the wise use of the soil resource base in Portage County.

The information in this publication, like all information developed from a statistical study, has varying degrees of reliability or confidence levels. All values expressed here, representing over 10 percent of the county area, have a confidence level greater than 90 percent or they are at least 90 percent accurate. Smaller values, those representing less than 10 percent of the total county area, will be less than 90 percent accurate.

September 1985

Land Use

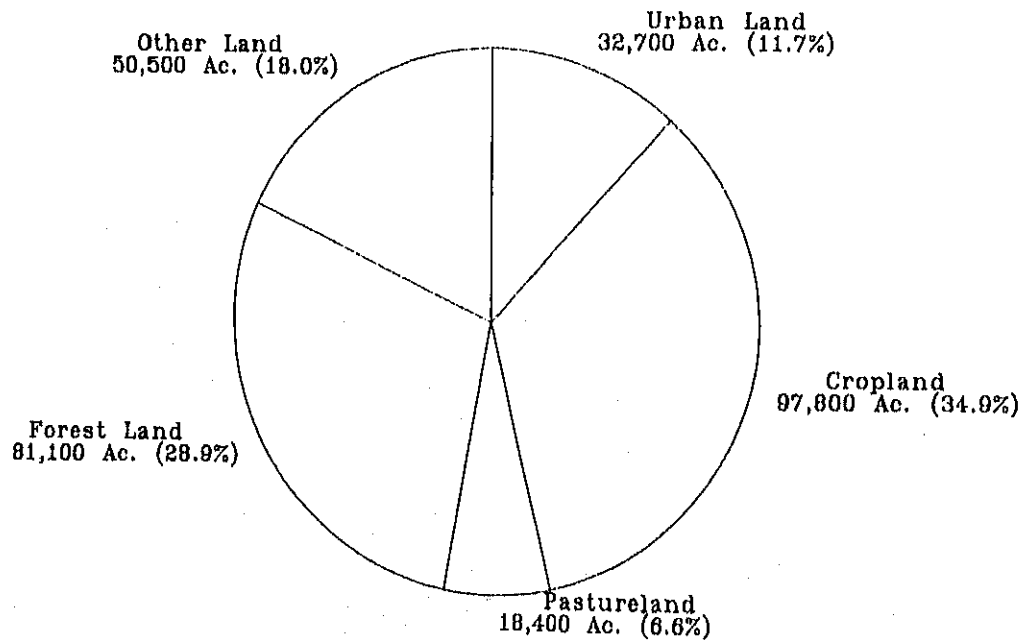
Land area measurements were made for Portage County during the 1980 Census by the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Table 1. Portage County Area Measurements

Nonfederal Land and Small Bodies of Water	280,500 Acres
Federal Land	34,900 Acres
Census Water (Large Bodies of Water)	7,300 Acres
Total Surface Area	322,700 Acres

This report addresses only nonfederal land.

Figure 1. Portage County Land Use



TOTAL NONFEDERAL ACREAGE IN PORTAGE COUNTY = 280,500 ACRES

KEY POINT:

• Cropland is the largest land use in the county.

Land Use by Capability Class

Soils can be classified in a number of ways. SCS uses a land capability classification system that groups soils on the basis of their ability to produce common cultivated crops and pasture plants without deterioration. Land capability classes and subclasses in Portage County are based on the soil survey.

Capability classes are designated by Roman numerals I through VIII. The numerals indicate progressively greater limitations and narrower choices for practical use. The classes are defined as follows:

Class I soils have few limitations that restrict their use.

Class II soils have moderate limitations that reduce the choice of agricultural use.

Class III soils have severe limitations that reduce the choice of agricultural use.

Class IV soils have very severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants, or that require very careful management, or both.

Class V soils are not likely to erode but have other limitations.

Class VI soils have severe limitations that make them generally unsuitable for cultivation.

Class VII soils have very severe limitations that make them unsuitable for cultivation.

Class VIII soils and miscellaneous areas have limitations that nearly preclude their use for commercial crop production.

Each capability class except Class I has subclasses to identify specific limitations. The letter "e" stands for erosion risk; "w" for wetness; and "s" for soils limited mainly because they are shallow, droughty, or stony.

Table 2. Rural Nonfederal Land Use Acreage by Capability Class

CLASS	CROPLAND Acres	PASTURELAND Acres	FOREST LAND Acres	OTHER LAND Rural Acres	TOTAL
I	900	0	900	0	1,800
II	38,100	4,300	18,600	5,900	66,900
III	48,400	9,500	41,800	17,900	117,600
IV	8,400	2,900	12,700	3,400	27,400
V	1,700	1,300	2,500	2,100	7,600
VI	300	400	3,000	2,000	5,700
VII	0	0	1,600	0	1,600
VIII	0	0	0	2,500	2,500
NA	0	0	0	6,300	6,300
TOTAL	97,800	18,400	81,100	40,100	237,400

KEY POINTS:

- o Eighty-eight percent of all cropland is on Classes II and III.
- o The majority of Classes IV, V, VI, and VII is in forest land.

Prime Farmland

Prime farmland is one of several kinds of important farmlands defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It is of major importance in providing the Nation's short and long range needs for food and fiber. Prime farmland soils are defined as the soils that are best suited to producing food, fiber, forage, feed, and oilseed crops. Such soils have properties that are favorable for the economic production of sustained high yields of crops. Prime farmland soils produce the highest yields with minimal inputs of energy and economic resources. Farming these soils results in the least damage to the environment.

Prime farmland is also the easiest and least costly to develop for non-agricultural uses. Urbanization and other land uses have the potential to consume significant areas of prime farmland. Decisions need to be made at the local level to encourage wise use of agricultural lands.

Portage County has 131,900 acres of prime farmland with all of it in Capability Classes I, II, and III.

Table 3. Prime Farmland by Rural Nonfederal Land Use

LAND USE	TOTAL ACRES	PRIME FARMLAND	
		Acres	Percent
Cropland	97,800	65,200	67
Pastureland	18,400	10,000	54
Forest Land	81,100	43,500	54
Other Land	40,100	13,200	33
TOTAL	237,400	131,900	56

KEY POINTS:

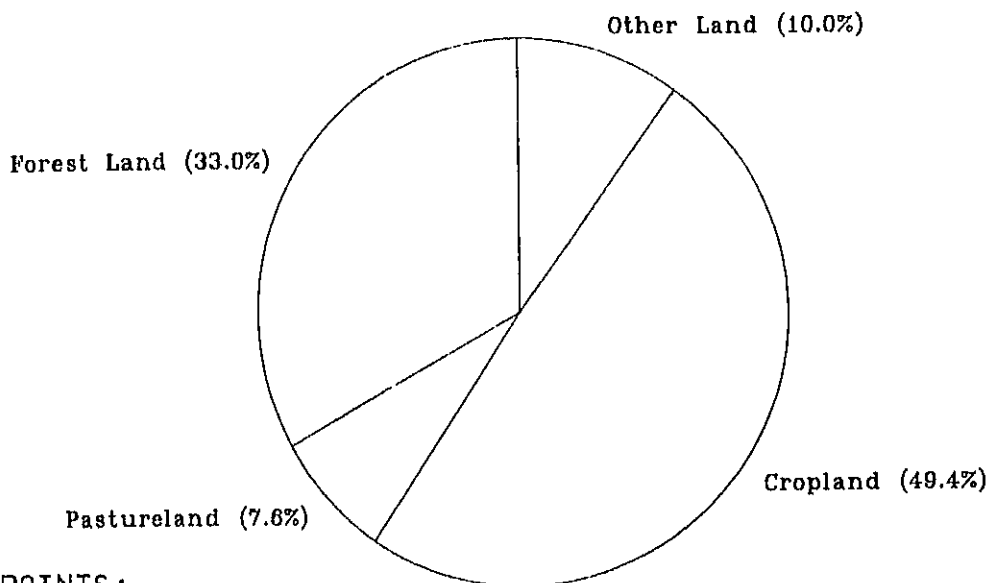
- o "Other land" figure includes 6,300 acres small built-up areas, less than 10 acres in size.

There is potential for converting other land uses to cropland since large acreages of prime farmland are in pastureland and forest land. Figure 2 illustrates the uses of prime farmland.

Figure 2.

Use Of Prime Farmland

Portage County



KEY POINTS:

- o Forty-nine percent of all prime farmland is cropland.

Soil Erosion

Soil erosion is a continuously occurring natural process that loosens and transports soil particles. Erosion occurs slowly on undisturbed forest land and areas with adequate permanent vegetative cover. Soil losses are quite high on sloping cropland that is continually cultivated and left unprotected during several months every year.

Over 293 thousand tons of topsoil erode on Portage County agricultural land annually. Over 77 percent of the erosion is on cropland.

Table 4. Annual Soil Erosion by Agricultural Land Use on Nonfederal Land

LAND USE	ACRES	TONS	TONS/ACRE
Cropland	97,800	227,400	2.3
Pastureland	18,400	5,000	0.3
Forest Land	81,100	61,200	0.8
TOTAL	197,300	293,600	
AVERAGE			1.5

Table 5. Erosion on Nonfederal Cropland by Capability Class and Subclass

CLASS AND SUBCLASS	ACRES	TONS	TONS/ACRE
I	900	400	0.4
IIe	27,600	70,400	2.6
IIw	10,400	14,900	1.4
IIs	100	0	0
IIIe	30,800	82,000	2.7
IIIw	17,600	22,600	1.3
IVe	4,500	25,500	5.7
IVw	3,900	10,300	2.6
V	1,700	100	0.1
VIe	300	1,200	4.0
TOTAL	97,800	227,400	
AVERAGE			2.3

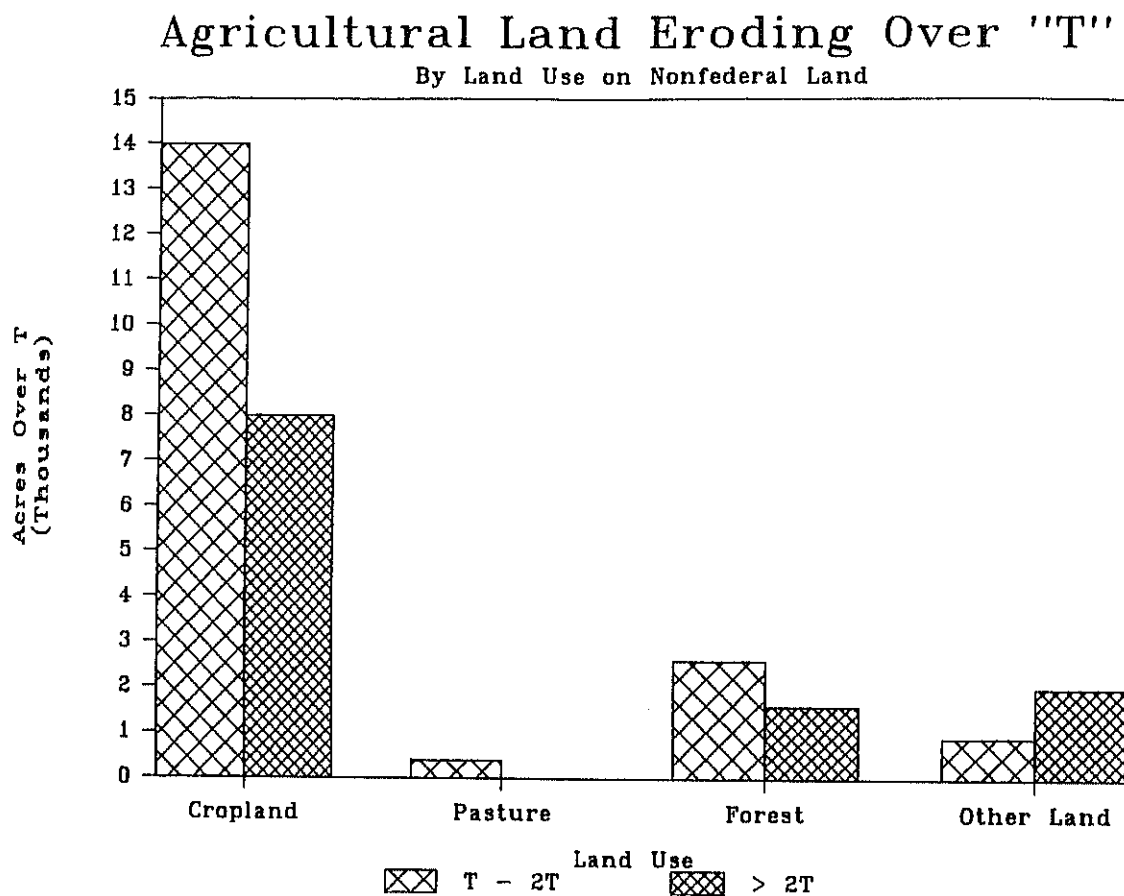
KEY POINTS:

- o Eighty-four percent of all cropland erosion is IIe, IIw, IIIe, and IIIw soils.
- o IVe soils have a high erosion rate.

Soil can tolerate small amounts of erosion and remain productive for agriculture. When erosion is above this tolerable limit, the soil resource base cannot be maintained and the future ability of the soil to produce crops is threatened. The tolerable soil loss ("T") ranges from three to five tons per acre per year, with most of the soils in Portage County having a "T" of three.

Almost 30,000 acres of agricultural land are eroding at rates greater than "T". There are 11,600 acres in the county eroding at rates greater than two times "T". These acres represent a serious threat to the productive capacity of the soil resource base.

Figure 3.



KEY POINTS:

- o Twenty-two thousand acres of cropland are eroding over "T".
- o Forty-two hundred acres of forest land are eroding over "T".

Cropland is located on the better soils in the county (see Tables 2 and 3). Twenty-three percent of these highly productive cropland acres are eroding excessively.

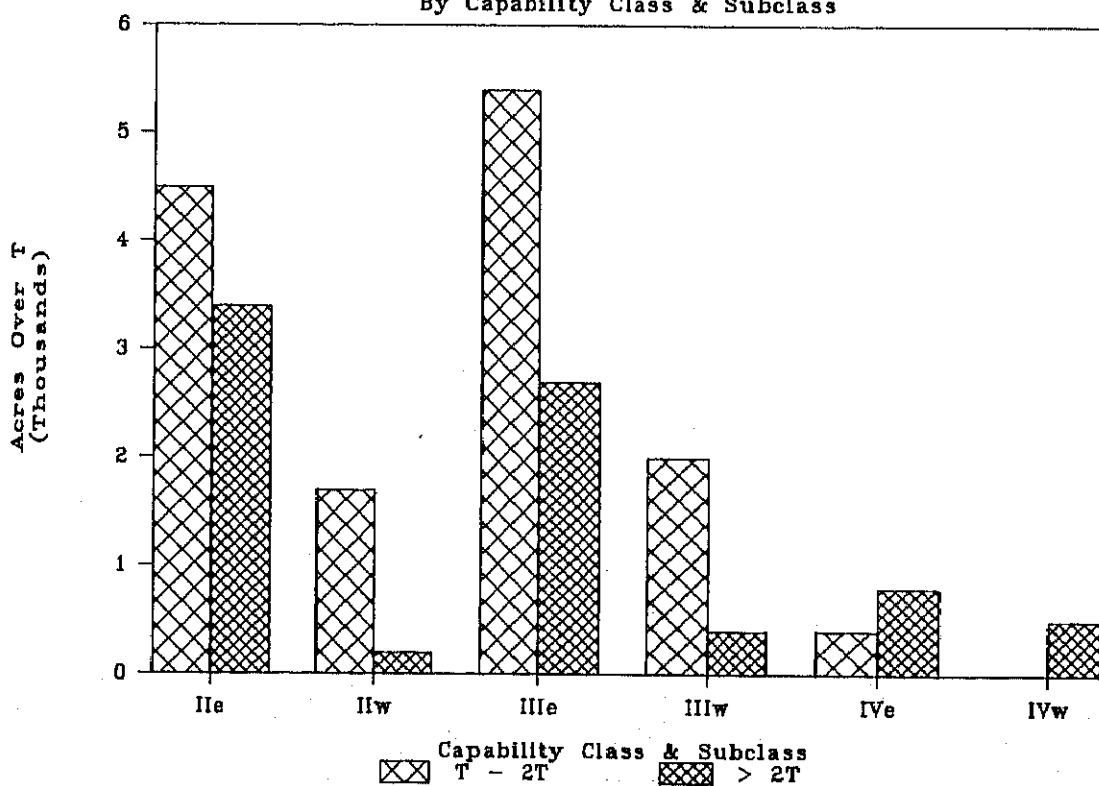
Table 6. Nonfederal Cropland in Relation to "T"
by Capability Class and Subclass

CAPABILITY CLASS	TOTAL	LESS THAN "T"	"T" - "2T"	GREATER THAN "2T"
-----ACRES-----				
I	900	900	0	0
IIe	27,600	19,700	4,500	3,400
IIw	10,400	8,500	1,700	200
IIs	100	100	0	0
IIIe	30,800	22,700	5,400	2,700
IIIw	17,600	15,200	2,000	400
IVe	4,500	3,300	400	800
IVw	3,900	3,400	0	500
V	1,700	1,700	0	0
VIe	300	300	0	0
TOTAL	97,800	75,800	14,000	8,000

KEY POINTS:

- o Twenty-two thousand acres or 22 percent of all cropland is eroding over "T".
- o Over eight percent of all cropland is eroding over "2T".

Figure 4. Cropland Eroding Over "T"
By Capability Class & Subclass



Conservation Treatment Needs

Many acres of Portage County agricultural land need one or more different types of conservation treatment to either protect or improve soil and water resources. The different conservation practices used to accomplish these objectives vary by land use.

Cropland treatment usually involves practices like conservation cropping systems, conservation tillage, grassed waterway, grade stabilization structure, subsurface drainage, and open ditch construction. Improving water quality is accomplished by installation of animal waste storage pond and management systems. Conservation practices to protect forest land include livestock exclusion, timber stand improvement, and tree planting. Areas that are critically eroding can be seeded to grasses and legumes to control erosion. Land designated as adequately protected is properly managed for production and protected from excessive erosion.

Table 7. Conservation Treatment Needs and Percent by Land Use on Nonfederal Land

LAND USE	TOTAL ACRES	TOTAL ACRES NEEDING TREATMENT	% TOTAL ACRES NEEDING TREATMENT
Cropland	97,800	28,200	29
Pastureland	18,400	8,400	46
Forest Land	81,100	36,800	45
Other Land	40,100	4,300	13
TOTAL	231,100	77,700	34

SUMMARY

Agriculture accounts for 82 percent of Portage County land use, about 35 percent is cropland. About 34,000 acres of land are owned by the federal government and 7,000 acres are covered by large bodies of water.

Almost 60 percent of Portage County is prime farmland. There are many acres in the county that could be converted to cropland. However, due to the location of the county there is a high demand for other nonagricultural land uses.

Serious erosion problems exist on 22 thousand acres of cropland as a result of a shift from crop rotations to more intensive row crop agriculture.